Newspapers by ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/780423193/

Downloaded on May 1, 2026

PHANTOM WITH A BILLION DOLLARS

Howard Hughes: Mystery Man Of The West

By RALPH DIGHTON
Associated Press Staff Writer

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (AP) — For a man who cherishes his privacy—he hasn't been seen in public for more than a decade —Howard Hughes has a perfectly developed knack for spotlight stealing.

Like, for instance, suddenly moving to this brassy gambling resort in December, 1966—on a stretcher, some say; like becoming, in lightning strokes, Nevada's biggest operator of casinos, with an investment close to $150 million; like putting a quarter of a million dollars in gold and silver mining land, and like, recently, suddenly offering to buy control of a national broadcast network for $148 billion (later withdrawing the offer).

The billionaire recluse has managed, in the meantime to clash with the Atomic Energy Commission, and incur investigations from the Federal Communications Commission and the Department of Justice.

Things are quiet just now in "Hughestate," a waggish name for Nevada since Hughes' arrival. Not one of his announced plans—for industrial expansion, for an airport to handle the supersonic transports of the 1970s, for a $150-million addition to his Sands Hotel—has yet reached the construction stage.

It is more likely that Hughes is marking time, awaiting the outcome of his brushes with federal agencies in three areas—all the result of his attempts to reinvest the $546 million he realized from the sale in 1966 of his 75 per cent interest in Trans World Airlines.

Hughes' tilt with the AEC came last April when, through spokesmen, he tried to block a megaton - sized underground nuclear test. The AEC said there was no danger, triggered the explosion on April 26, and later said there was no significant damage. Even bigger detonations are set for this fall.

Unconfirmed reports say Hughes may be making his own survey of potential hazards in the meantime and may offer this evidence before the next test. If he fails again, this could have a major effect on his Nevada plans.

Offer To Buy ABC

The offer to buy control of the American Broadcasting Company, made July 1, brought a quick response from the FCC: Hughes must not attempt to exercise control pending public hearings to examine his qualifications. Two weeks later, he dropped the effort.

The offer came one day after Hughes failed to close—at the request of the Department of Justice—his state-approved deal to buy his sixth gambling house, the Stardust Hotel and casino on Las Vegas' glittering Strip.

Hughes' renewed financial vigor—at an age (nearing 63) when most men are planning to retire—adds intrigue to one of the most mysterious figures of the 20th century. Few men in history have matched his personal wealth—estimated at close to $1.5 billion—or his paradoxes.

His life is a multicolored checkerboard of careers: a record-smashing daredevil in the golden age of aviation and aircraft designer; a Hollywood playboy—and a hard-driving producer of frequently profitable movies; a rich man's shy and gangling son—and a calculating wizard who parlayed a paltry million or so into a vast industrial empire.

Behind a self-imposed obscurity, enforced by a small army of gun-toting guards, Hughes lives as a demigod, unreachable, untouchable, unphotographable. He refuses all requests for interviews. When he has something to say, he issues statements through a tight-knit group of aides known as the Hughes Organization, headed by ex-FBI man Robert Maheu. Sharing his solitude is his wife, Jean Peters, a onetime movie star whom he wooed, lost and finally won 11 years ago.

Some reports say they still live in the penthouse atop the Desert Inn, Hughes' first purchase in Las Vegas. Others say they have moved to a rented $100,000 residence near the Strip, or to a $18-acre desert ranch he bought recently from the estate of the late Vera Krupp, widow of the German industrialist.

Veil of Secrecy

Through this veil of secrecy Hughes somehow manages to run a growing empire, with owned or leased facilities in five states.

In California are the headquarters of the Hughes Aircraft Co., which makes aviation electronics and spacecraft such as the moon-landing Surveyors, and the aircraft division of Hughes Tool Co., which turns out helicopters. These are at Culver City, a Los Angeles suburb. The Aircraft Co. also has facilities at Los Angeles International Airport, Santa Barbara, Malibu, El Segundo, Fullerton and Newport Beach.

In Texas, in Hughes' home town of Houston, are the headquarters of the parent Hughes Tool Co., a petroleum equipment firm with facilities in oil producing areas around the world.

In Arizona, near Tucson, is the Hughes Aircraft Co.'s big missile plant, which produces Falcon and Phoenix missile systems for the Air Force.

In Nevada, Hughes owns four Las Vegas hotels, the Desert Inn, the Sands, the Frontier and the Castaways, and the Silver Slipper Supper Club; a television station, GLAS-TV; two small airports, Alamo Airways and North Las Vegas Air Terminal; the Krupp ranch; 480 acres near Virginia City in the old Comstock Lode mining field, and 20,000 acres of desert west of Las Vegas. Plans for the for the latter have not been disclosed.

Miami, Fla., is the site of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, a research foundation which makes grants to universities in support of projects in which Hughes is interested.

The ready cash which made Hughes' recent plunges possible came from a now-closed chapter in his life—a chapter which insured his niche in history as a titan of finance and revealed him as the world's most determined recluse. The chapter could be titled simply: TWA.

Hughes started buying up TWA stock in the late 1930s with an initial investment of less than $2 million. Later purchases of large but undisclosed amounts gave him control.

These outlays, along with investments in movies which did not pay immediate returns, had stretched his readily available resources thin by the time the jet age opened in the 1950s. Hughes did not have the cash to buy whole fleets of new airliners as did competitor corporations.

Investment Deals

To get financing, he had to make a deal with investment firms which objected to his one-man control. Hughes was allowed to keep his stock but had to yield his voting rights to a syndicate. Air travel boomed with the advent of jets and TWA became a transportation giant. The value of Hughes' stock rocketed.

The new managers of TWA, unable to make heads or tails

HOWARD HUGHES
. . . Billionaire recluse

of Hughes' affairs, filed suits accusing him of mismanagement. Hughes made similar charges in a bitter, years-long fight to regain control.

After a legal stalemate lasting more than five years the "phantom of finance" sold out, reaping an almost incredible fortune from the rise in value of TWA stock.

Hughes spokesmen usually date his withdrawal from public life to this period, explaining that lawyers had advised him to keep silent, that anything he said might be used to prolong the litigation.

Actually, however, Hughes went underground in the late 1940s, after two events which marked a turning point in his life. The first was an airplane crash which almost killed him, in 1946. The second was a congressional investigation a year later of his giant flying boat, a wooden plywood "spruce goose" which cost the government $18 million but never achieved its goal of spanning oceans with 750 troops.

Hughes designed the 200-ton monster—220 feet long and 320 feet from wing tip to wing tip— of wood to save war-scarce aluminum. It was not finished, however, until 1947.

That year, congressmen probing wartime expenditures summoned Hughes for an explanation. Armed with drawings and statistics, he proved to their satisfaction that there had been no fraud. To the contrary, he testified, he had put $5 million of his own into the craft and it soon would be ready to fly.

It did, with Hughes at the controls, a few months later. On a taxi run in Long Beach Harbor, the great wooden hull lifted above the slapping waves to a height of 70 feet and remained airborne for about a mile. The "flying lumberyard" never flew again and Hughes has kept it housed since, under guard, in a T-shaped hangar at the waterfront.

In those days Hughes was a tall, handsome man-about-town who sought fun, fame and femininity with expensive disregard for the cost. There was no hint then of the cold, distrusting, sometimes bearded hermit in the legends abounding today.

What changed him? Hughes himself may not know the answer.

Chain of Events

There is, however, a chain of events linking the two phases of his life.

While he was building the flying boat, Hughes also was developing a high speed reconnaissance plane, the XF-11. During a test flight over Los Angeles in 1946 one of the twin sets of counterrotating propellers failed, throwing the craft out of control. Hughes stayed in the plane, fighting to land it on a golf course, but it crashed into three houses.

Hughes spent five weeks in a hospital recovering from a crushed chest, a skull fracture and burns over much of his body.

Hughes emerged from the hospital pale, thin and fighting a limp.

A desire for privacy, noted occasionally in his younger years when he was likely to work as long as 40 hours at a stretch, grew into a passion.

It may have been nourished by an isolating and introverting deafness, by facial scars inflicted in the XF-11 crash, or by the congressional investigation, which aides said the always sensitive Hughes found a harrowing experience.

Whatever the motivation, by the end of the 1940s Hughes had virtually faded from public view, leaving only second-hand reports of his existence.

Friends who visited Hughes' wife, Jean Peters, after their 1957 marriage said she appeared to be happy and devoted. But none actually saw Hughes himself.

For a time Jean went to social affairs alone, but that stopped and she, too, vanished into the sepulchre of silence beyond the golden wall.

Marriage Surprise

The marriage of the industrialist and the athletic, outdoorsy actress was a surprise ranking with the strangest of his actions.

In his Hollywood days, Hughes had been romantically linked with some of the world's most enchanting women, including Katharine Hepburn, Olivia DeHavilland, Ginger Rogers, Yvonne de Carlo, Ida Lupino, Ava Gardner, Jean Harlow, Jane Russell and Gina Lollobrigida.

His first marriage, to Ella Rice of Houston in 1925, ended in divorce four years later and friends predicted he would never marry again.

Then, at the age of 51, he married Jean, a pigtails-and-dungarees type. A 21-year-old onetime Ohio farm girl, she was as proud of her prowess at woodchopping as she was of her instantaneous success in films.

Hughes has never disclosed exactly when, or even where, they were married. Since 1957, however, friends have received Christmas cards printed "Jean and Howard Hughes."

All during the time their boss was supposed to be critically ill back in 1966, Hughes' spokesmen had instructions to say absolutely nothing about his health. Soon after he arrived here, however, they began telling all who asked that Hughes was in excellent health. They would not say, however, whether he had been ill earlier.

Now that he has become active again, with one of the world's biggest fortunes at his command, Hughes may spring other surprises as time unfolds.

ROLLING CLINIC TO PROVIDE AID FOR RIO GRANDE UNDERPRIVILEGED . . . The Rev. Lloyd Conner, left, gets unit key from Ed Nusko

Rio Grande Residents To Receive Medical Aid From Mobile Clinic

MARFA (STNS) — Medical help has come to the residents of the Rio Grande atop the chasis of a one-time school bus.

The Big Bend Baptist Association took delivery on the bus recently and has already made one trip to the river where Dr. G. C. Goddard of Bastrop treated at least 275 persons from Porvenir, Pilares and Lomas de Arena.

The bus was provided through funds from the association and from the Amigos Internacionales, Inc., a group of Athens businessmen who have a hobby of helping people.

"This is the second one of these units they have built," said the Rev. Lloyd Conner, pastor of First Baptist Church in Marfa.

The other unit is in the Brownsville-Harlingen area serving primarily as a dental unit. The men worked about four months on preparing the unit for the Big Bend association.

In the front of the bus is a dental unit, complete with a "cavatron," a unit which works on a patient's teeth using ultronic sound waves.

"A dentist can do anything he is able to do in his office," said the Rev. Mr. Conner.

Also in the dental compartment of the unit is a kitchenette, hot plate, refrigerator for medicine, a sterilizer and storage space.

The rear of the bus is equipped to handle medical cases. It has an examining table, wash basin, storage space, electric toilet and a shower.

"The only thing we don't have is an X-ray unit," proclaimed the Rev. Mr. Conner, a long-time worker for poor residents along the Rio Grande.

On its first visit to the Rio Grande villages, Dr. Goddard gave inoculations for smallpox, pelin, DPT for children and tetanus for adults. Also he treated illnesses in the villages.

"The children were more curious than scared," said the Rev. Mr. Conner, "And the adults were just grateful."

All of the work is done on the American side of the river.

The association covers an area from Van Horn on the west, Pumpville on the east, Presidio on the south and Balmorhea on the north.

The medical unit was partially financed by the association with the rest coming from the Amigos Internacionales, which holds title to the vehicles and furnished license and insurance.

The unit is 100 per cent self-contained including a 5,000 watt generator operating a 110 volt electrical system, an 85-gallon water tank along with a butane tank mounted on the rear. The unit is cooled by an evaporative cooler.

The unit is valued at $10,000 to $12,000.

The association's part of the cost came from the $350,000 Baptist General Convention fund for use by the seven Baptist associations on the river for mission work along the river.

Stocking the bus will have to come from contributions to the Big Bend Association. The doctors who work the unit donate time and oftentimes medicine.

The unit will have to make three more visits to the Porvenir-Pilares-Lomas de Arena area to complete inoculations.

Art Director Is Important Cog In Movie Machinery

By KENT FLANAGAN
Standard-Times Staff Writer

BIG SPRING — No one reads the credits of a movie beyond the names of actors and director except "show biz" people and critics.

The ordinary moviegoer wouldn't know what the art director of a movie is much less his connection with a lusty love scene, fist fight or other scene set in a West Texas ranchhouse in the early 1900s.

Yet the art director has the sometimes difficult — sometimes easy — task of translating directions of a script and director's ideas into realistic constructed set that looks authentic and supports the script.

This is how John R. Lloyd, art director for the Jerome Hellman-John Schlesinger production of "Midnight Cowboy," described his job. The last sequences of the "late western" are now being filmed on location at Stanton and Big Spring.

Lloyd said Stanton and Big Spring offered the ideal locations with few problems for the West Texas sequences of "Midnight Cowboy."

"The locality here in West Texas is so ideal for the story line," Lloyd explained, "It seemed as if this was precisely the area John Schlesinger (director) and Waldo Salt had in mind in the early scripting."

JOHN R. LLOYD
. . . Art Director

But the "Midnight Cowboy" script did present problems of having to design sets that would support the script.

"Midnight Cowboy' is written in a fast-cutting, fragmentary manner — each vignette full of inventive idea," Lloyd explained.

"In a more conventional script, half as many sets would be needed to tell a story of the same length," he continued.

"It takes precisely the same amount of energy and imagination to prepare a set for a two-page scene as for a 20-page scene," Lloyd added.

Most of the filming of "Cowboy" was completed in Film-ways Studios in New York City and on location in New York City and Miami Beach.

Lloyd has worked with all the studio and location sets for the production and has worked closely with his set decorator, Philip Smith, his scene artists and carpenters to make certain nothing is left to chance.

With 20 years of art direction experience in scene design for films, television and stage, Lloyd has developed a technique for establishing mood with "color and texture."

"First I read and study the script and break it down into scenes and set requirements.

"Next come rough layouts which include my impression of the flow of action or the required geography of a set or location.

"Then I have a lengthy meeting with the director for a full discussion of set requirements," Lloyd explained.

"Then I reorganize my original plans and design ideas to suit his interpretation of the script," Lloyd added. "From these notes I re-evaluate and design each scene."

The numerous conferences with the director and author are held to discuss smaller points of artistic judgment to fulfill script requirements.

Once approved, the design interpretation is drawn and put into work, he said, and problems of set dressings and finishing is approached.

MAYOR JIM REESE

He's The Pride And Joy Of The Odessa Jaycees

By MILDRED CHAFFIN
Standard-Times Special Correspondent

ODESSA — "The individual means something to Jim," said a long-time Ector County political scene observer here recently. "That's the secret of his popularity. He may not be able to do something about every problem, but you can bet he will listen, and help if he can."

"Jim" is Mayor Jim Reese of Odessa, the 38-year-old pride and joy of the local Jaycees, who received such a landslide vote in the April city election his opponent reportedly remarked, "I wonder if anyone knew I was running."

Reese, by his own admission, is a young man in a hurry to get things done, and there isn't much doubt in the minds of a lot of people he can do just about anything he sets out to do.

"Actually," Reese said, "I would have preferred to wait five or 10 years before running for mayor or doing this type of thing, but I was concerned about the progress of the town, and I thought we could do some things that needed to be done."

Reese is a new breed of political conservative with his eye on the future and a firm conviction there is need for development of a creative new direction and purpose emphasizing involvement. An advocate of private enterprise and less governmental control, he recognizes social and economic ills that exist and wants to do something about them.

One of Reese's first objectives after becoming mayor here is to appoint a study commission to study transportation problems which exist in Odessa. These problems affect the lower income groups, primarily, and in some cases mean the difference between a man's or woman's ability to earn a living since getting to and from jobs in a city with no public transit system sometimes becomes an impossibility.

Several proposals to alleviate the problem have been made, one of which was given a trial run and failed. If Reese has anything to say about it, the matter will not be closed until all avenues of solution have been explored.

"I think we are fortunate in Odessa to have the type of leadership in our Negro and Latin community that recognizes the proper way to progress," Reese said. "We do have some inequities. It is difficult to collateralize loans if you want to build a building or a home or start in business. It is difficult to get things started, and we need to remedy this situation."

Reese is a convincing "soft sell" speaker, but his actions speak even more eloquently. He lost little time after taking office in starting the dialogue which he believes will bring about some of the remedies he seeks.

More than 100 representatives of various city and county agencies, school system, Chamber of Commerce officials and other interested citizens attended a recent public meeting to learn about a program described by Reese as "a device for using the free enterprise system to solve social problems."

JIM REESE
. . . Odessa mayor

Morgan Doughton, former national Jaycees president and president of a corporation called Program Dynamics Group, Inc. was invited to Odessa by Reese to explain a program he helped design, called Inter-City Opportunity and Talent for Entrepreneurship (INCOTE).

"INCOTE is not an organization or an agency," said Doulthon. "It is a system and an approach which has already proven its success in attracting the massive support of leading institutions at a multi-million dollar annual rate in one city alone."

"To remedy the situation in Odessa you are going to have to have the cooperation of people from every part of town," Reese emphasized. "I think our people all recognize that this cooperation is the only way to get things done. I think Doughton's discussion is a very constructive way to do this."

Reese believes creating jobs in Odessa is the most important item on his agenda for the immediate future.

"The oil industry obviously is leveling out," he said. "Odessa and this area sort of grew by default over a period of years. No one had to work at it. No one had to be interested in growth, because it just happened. Now, that is no longer the case."

Reese said progress is going to take a very constructive and progressive attitude on the part of the people to attract industry and get the diversification needed.

"Our petrochemical complex out here has been of tremendous help to Odessa, but we can't allow things to stop there."

The mayor is confident people of Odessa are ready and eager to help, and cites the recent effort on the part of the "Committee of 66" to enlist community support for progress.

"I think the problem may have been we just didn't recognize the need to go after people and to go after industry and to hold what we have," he theorized when asked what he considered the major cause of Odessa's recent economic slump.

"Other states have been aggressively seeking industry — but we have never had to do this out here. Consequently, when the time came where we had to, we didn't recognize it for a while. But the time is here."

The new mayor believes the two things Odessa needs most to accomplish are successful completion of the Permian Basin Railroad to provide a second avenue for transportation, and a four-year college, both of which he is confident will culminate in the near future.

"Some industries will not consider a location unless they have some type of transportation competition," Reese explained. "I think this is going to be finally approved and become a reality in the near future."

The Permian Basin Railroad Co. is presently awaiting word on whether the United States Supreme Court will hear an appeal by the Texas and Pacific Railway Co. to block completion of the short line.

"Our people at Odessa College are doing a fine job in working with local industry to provide training in the types of skills that we need," said Reese. "But we don't have a degree that we can offer and this has been a problem and will be a problem until we get our four-year institution."

Taxes, obsolete building codes, inequitable ordinances which cannot always be enforced, disgruntled city workers, a slowed down economy — the mayor has had less than casual encounters with most of these problems in the few short months he has been in office.

Reese laughed when asked about possible future political plans. "I'll be lucky to survive this one term of office as mayor," he quipped.

"I expect our city budget this year to be handled without any increase in either ad valorem or sales taxes," he said. "Now, it could be that this is the last year where we can handle our expenses without an increase in taxes."

"The only thing that bothers me that I can foresee as far as the budget is concerned is that I don't like to keep a lid on salaries and run the risk of losing city employees to private industry," he said. If you have to raise taxes in order to get efficiency and to operate economically, insofar as the personnel you can attract, then I think that is a justification for raising taxes," Reese explained.

"I think probably a year from now we will have to look carefully at raising taxes, and then we are going to have to make a decision of whether to go sales tax or continue our evaluation or ad valorem taxes." The mayor is opposed to Gov. John Connally's recently proposed sales tax plan.

Reese does not believe the progressive measures he advocates to attract industry should be a function of the city government or in spending tax money to do so, "I think it is merely a matter of attitude and showing people we will help them and cooperate with them any way we can," he said.

While he does not consider city building codes a major problem, he does feel that some aspects of the city building code is "unrealistic" and has directed city attorney Marshall McCrea to go over all ordinances with the planning board and make recommendations to remove the ambiguities which he feels are frequently unenforceable.

Copyright © 2026 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.